

Computer Mapping and Data Protection

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Chapter III Outline

III. Maps on the Internet

NOTE: The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the special problems that arise when a police department decides to put maps on the Internet

- A. The availability of maps poses several problems for police departments:
 - 1. Potential for misinterpretation and misuse of data by the users.
 - 2. Privacy of victims regarding their offense and its exact location.
 - 3. Impact on property values because buyers avoid high crime areas.
- B. Some suggested approaches for making maps available on the Internet:
 - 1. Present crime data in an aggregated manner, such as police beats, census tracts, or communities, rather than in a pinpointed manner. See, e.g., Wichita Police Dept. web site.
 - 2. Provide redacted data tables or records.
 - 3. Eliminate exact street addresses in tables or records by replacing them with a block range or by giving the geographic area, such as beat or police reporting area.
 - 4. Provide “map interpretation” guidelines for viewers (general guidelines, not specific to a given map).

- C. Use disclaimers.
- D. When putting maps on the Internet, an agency must be aware of security of the site and the data.
 - 1. Maps available to the public on the Internet generally will not have security, such as passwords for access.
 - 2. The real concerns are privacy, not security.
 - 3. One exception may occur in the future if police departments want to provide a particular group, such as a Neighborhood Watch Association, with detailed maps on crime in their areas, but not make these maps available to anyone else.
 - a. In this scenario, the police department will have to establish some means of security, such as passwords or encryption.
 - 4. A more general concern for police departments is the potential for hackers to access police department records through its Internet site.
 - a. In this case, the department may want to establish a firewall to protect the site.